



Carrier, N. C. M., & Mathews, G. (2020). Places of Otherness: Comparing Eastleigh, Nairobi and Xiaobei, Guangzhou as Sites of South-South Migration. *Migration and Society*, 3 (2020), 98-122.  
<https://doi.org/10.3167/arms.2020.030109>

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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## RESEARCH ARTICLES

### Places of Otherness

#### Comparing Eastleigh, Nairobi, and Xiaobei, Guangzhou, as Sites of South-South Migration

*Neil Carrier and Gordon Mathews*

■ **ABSTRACT:** This article looks at two urban landscapes critical for mobility within the Global South: Eastleigh, Kenya, and Xiaobei, China. While different, they are both centers of global trade that attract migrants seeking livelihoods, and are also regarded with great ambivalence within the countries that host them. We explore this ambivalence, showing how it links to fear of the “others” who animate them, and to broader politics in which migrants become caught. Such places often simultaneously attract members of the host society for a taste of the other, or business opportunities, yet also repel and induce fear as places of danger. For the migrant population, there is also ambivalence—as they are places that offer both opportunity for social mobility, yet also places of hard lives and immobility. In short, both are critical nodes in patterns of South-South mobility where dynamics of such mobility and reaction to it can be understood.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Africa-China, Eastleigh, “low end” globalization, migration, South-South mobility, urbanity, Xiaobei

### Introduction

City districts often become emblematic of migration, the numerous Little Italys and Chinatowns of the world being cases in point. This article looks at two interconnected sites in the “Global South” that have become emblematic of much South-South migration and mobility: Eastleigh, Nairobi’s “Little Mogadishu,” and Xiaobei, the most important African district of Guangzhou. While different in numerous ways, they both reveal patterns of mobility in the Global South and how this mobility is perceived and treated by host countries. As trade hubs they also reveal how much mobility of people within the Global South depends on the flow of trade goods, principally those of what has been termed “low-end globalisation” (Mathews 2018). There is a shifting constellation of such trade hubs across the world, many linking African countries to those of Asia. Not all these hubs can be easily defined as being in the “Global South,” in the usual definition of low- and middle-income (“developing”) countries, especially



places like Hong Kong and Dubai, and they also connect strongly to cities in the “North” too: understanding such mobility as purely a “South-South” phenomenon is bound to be restrictive and inaccurate (Bakewell 2009). Yet a critical look at such sites and the mobility that shaped them and that they shape in turn shows dynamic relations of crucial importance, but ones often obscured by the dominance of so-called “global cities” of the North in the migration and urban studies literature.

This article is based on ethnographic research carried out over several years by Neil Carrier in Nairobi and Gordon Mathews and his students in Guangzhou. Carrier has been visiting Eastleigh since 1999, and conducted research there from 2011 to 2014 on how the estate had developed into the global hub of today. As well as participant observation over many months, interviews, and archival research, Carrier conducted several questionnaire surveys of Somali, Ethiopian, and Kenyan traders and residents living in the estate (Carrier 2016). Mathews’s research entailed a year spent living in the various traders’ hotels in Xiaobei in Guangzhou in 2013–2014, as well as numerous research visits to the city in 2011–2012 and 2015–2016 along with his students Linessa Lin Dan and Yang Yang. Their research was conducted through participant observation and also through interviews conducted with some 230 African and Arab traders and logistics agents as well as Chinese merchants in Xiaobei (Mathews et al. 2017).

This article builds on our shared interest in the connections between such hubs, connections evident in our respective single-sited research projects that show how such sites as Eastleigh and Xiaobei cannot be understood without understanding what connects them to so many other hubs across the world. Indeed, Mathews’s research on Guangzhou led him directly to Eastleigh. People, capital, and goods constantly circulate through these sites, very often the same people, capital, and goods, and it is in such places that many dreams of mobility and social mobility take shape. The article will accordingly give overviews of Eastleigh and Xiaobei and their mobility dynamics, dynamics that share some similarities (being generally built on the “low-end” trade in similar goods, and operated by some of the same transnational actors), as well as contrasts (Eastleigh being mainly a site of regional migration, and Xiaobei a site of mainly global migration). While the article shows how such places of “South-South” migration offer opportunities for literal and social mobility—opportunities that the Global North attempts to restrict for citizens of the South—they can hardly be idealized as places of progressive migration politics. Indeed, both places show that migration and mobility within the Global South meet as much ambivalence and outright hostility as they do in the North.

### **“Low-End” Global Hubs and “South-South” Mobility**

In the last few decades, “global city” has become an important concept in studying urbanization and globalization through the work of Saskia Sassen (1991). Her work focused on London, New York, and Tokyo, and criticized the globalization literature for its lack of focus on the actual places where globalization took shape. Instead, Sassen showed how globalization was very much emplaced, primarily within these interconnected cities. While giving new purchase on contemporary patterns of globalization, such literature can give the impression that such worldly urban spaces are principally located in the wealthy Global North. Such an impression might be further reinforced by literature on globalization, such as James Ferguson’s *Global Shadows* (2006), which emphasized how global flows of capital investment are not all-encompassing, but often hop and skip over parts of the world, including much of Africa. Yet global connections are not the preserve of elite cities: many parts of Africa and elsewhere in the Global South are incorporated into global flows, just not necessarily those of “high-end globalization.”

Indeed, much of the Global South is globally connected, yet connected in ways previously missed in analyses of globalization. Most people in the world today, particularly in the developing world, experience globalization not through the “high-end globalization” of Apple, Samsung, Google, McDonald’s, and Huawei, huge corporations with multitudes of lawyers and vast budgets for advertising. Rather, globalization comes to them through “low-end globalization,” the transnational flow of people and goods involving relatively small amounts of capital and informal, sometimes semilegal or illegal transactions, most often found in the developing world, but apparent in various forms throughout the world. These two forms of globalization are often intermingled, and many traders engage in both in different times and places; but they are clearly distinguishable as different forms of globalization (see Mathews et al. 2017: 81–113). Low-end globalization was termed “the informal economy” in the 1970s (Hart 1973; Portes et al. 1989), but has been more recently discussed in terms of globalization (Mathews et al. 2012; Neuwirth 2011), whether as “globalization from below” or “low-end globalization.” Low-end globalization typically takes place without contracts or recourse to the law; it is run most typically through wads of cash and reserves of interpersonal trust (Carrier and Elliott 2018). This is the form of globalization that has enabled the developing world to experience the global—thanks to largely knockoff and copied goods manufactured in China, bought in neighborhoods in Guangzhou such as Xiaobei, and sent to global nodes such as, among the most prominent, Eastleigh. Emblematic of low-end globalization is the smartphone, which has helped democratize globalization, enabling not just the developed world but the entire world to experience the internet (although of course many inequalities remain in this regard). The developing world may once have been “abjected” from much globalization so celebrated in the 1990s (Allen and Hamnett 1995: 2; Ferguson 2006: 25–49), but with the emergence of cheap phones and other goods of globalization, most generally copies or knockoffs made in China, global goods can be acquired practically worldwide.

Like the global connections focused on by Sassen, this globalization is also emplaced—mostly in urban places like Chungking Mansions (Mathews 2011), Hong Kong’s “low-end” shopping mall much frequented by traders from Africa and South Asia, and in our case studies for this article. These are hubs for global trade and communication, often disconnected in some ways from the geographical territory in which they reside. They act as nodes for trade networks crisscrossing the globe, but are especially strongly interconnected within the Global South. While some of these hubs have long been sites of trade and commerce—for example, Dubai—others, including Eastleigh and Xiaobei, have come to prominence much more recently, often in the wake of trade liberalization policies of the 1990s, and the rapid growth of China as the world’s factory. The speed of change in some of these hubs has been breathtaking, with landscapes such as those of Eastleigh transformed.

As well as being hubs for “low-end” goods and capital, these are also hubs for migration and mobility. Indeed, these places are critical sites for understanding South-South mobility and its dynamics. Much focus in recent years has been on links between migration/mobility and the city: how cities are formed through movement of people, and how they spur further mobility in turn (Carrier and Scharrer 2019). The trade hubs we focus on depend on human mobility regionally and globally: it is often to such sites that people venture in search of livelihoods and even the chance to reach desired, wealthier places. In these places, the success of earlier generations of mobile entrepreneurs—evident in businesses and buildings—encourages others to try their luck in trade, while news of current opportunities travels fast. While they are places where global dreams are forged, they also can be harsh places where dreams of mobility (both literal mobility and social mobility) are dashed and people become stuck. Indeed, as we show in what follows, low-end globalization has sparked much economic development—development

evident in its hubs—yet it cannot be relied upon for sustainable futures, especially as such places are seen with great suspicion by the states that host them (see the essays in Mathews et al. 2012). These hubs of South-South migration show all too clearly how it is not only in the Global North that migrants have to navigate deeply hostile policies and outright xenophobia, as our case studies will demonstrate.

## Eastleigh

Our first case study, Eastleigh, is an estate known throughout the world, partly because it has received international media attention due to its fascinating economy and refugee population—and for the often heavy-handed approach of the Kenyan state to its population—but also because it is so well-known among the global Somali diaspora. Indeed, in meeting Somalis in the US, Australia, Norway, and many other countries, one is likely to meet people who have either lived or visited Eastleigh, or who have relatives there. It is a global Somali hub (Carrier 2016), and a center of global Somali trade and politics. Somali identity is strong in the estate, with the Somali language being spoken widely and also conspicuous in names of businesses, and the blue-and-white flag of the Somali nation is commonly displayed. It is evident why it has become known as a “Little Mogadishu,” acting as it does as a displaced capital of the Somali world since the civil war in Somalia. However, it is also much more diverse (and even “super-diverse,” to use Steven Vertovec’s [2007] term for the hypercomplex forms of identity now common in major sites of migration around the world), and much more Kenyan than the name “Little Mogadishu” suggests. Indeed, ethnic Somali visitors to the estate are often US or UK nationals, while Chinese suppliers, Africans from as far afield as the Congo, and Ethiopians (many of whom are refugees living in the estate) also reside and work there. Much of its Somali population is also Kenyan by nationality—Somalis form a large ethnic group in Kenya, mainly in the northeast of the country—while the estate is home to members of many other Kenyan ethnicities.

This cosmopolitan “ethnoscape” is not just a recent phenomenon. From its very earliest days in the 1910s, Eastleigh was a diverse place where many had links to faraway places (Carrier 2016: chap. 1). The land that formed Eastleigh was first planned out in the early twentieth century by a group of European and South African land speculators. Although initially conceived as a European estate within Nairobi’s racialized planning, it soon became home instead to Nairobi’s considerable Indian population, who would dominate demographically until the late colonial period. This population was itself diverse, with a mixed population including Goans and Punjabis, and by the 1950s Indian identity was inscribed on several of the street names of the estate, for example, Girmar Lane. While designated a non-African estate in the colonial era, it also accommodated a substantial population of Kikuyus and others (White 1990).

Eastleigh had a Somali population from early on. While often seen as a nomadic pastoralist people (Whittaker 2019), there is a long history of Somali urbanity, and Somalis originating in the British Protectorate of Somaliland settled in the estate in the late 1910s. Farah Aden, the housekeeper of Karen Blixen, was one such Somali who settled with his family in the earliest days of the estate. There was a small but conspicuous Somali presence in Eastleigh throughout the colonial era and early days of Independence, supplemented by newcomers from Somali clans from northern Kenya, for whom Eastleigh became their urban base.

Post-Independence, much of the Indian population was replaced by non-Somali Africans, principally Kikuyu, who bought up many of the plots. Meanwhile, the Somali population continued to grow, Eastleigh also hosting Somali refugees in the 1970s, including a number fleeing the Ogaden War. But it was in the late 1980s when the estate’s current demographics took

shape as thousands of Somali refugees settled there as an alternative to Kenya's refugee camps. While exact figures for the number of Somalis in Eastleigh are unavailable, the rise between 1979 and 1999 in Eastleigh's wider population speaks of growth driven by both a refugee influx, urban mobility, and rural-urban migration within Kenya: the population rose from 53,562 to 246,420, a rise of 360 percent (Asoka et al. 2013). While only a proportion of this total would be accounted for by Somalis, as other groups were in-migrating too, it is likely that over 10,000 Somali refugees were living in Eastleigh by the mid-1990s.

It was these refugees who would begin the conversion of Eastleigh into a commercial hub. Among them were those experienced in trade and business in Mogadishu and elsewhere in Somalia, and who had contacts in places like Dubai. They were able to source cheap clothes (some smuggled into Kenya through Somalia), and sold these from their lodging rooms, storing the goods under their beds at night, and displaying them on their beds during the day for customers. A canny Kenyan-Somali woman saw the possibilities as more and more Kenyans came to the estate to buy clothes sold much cheaper than those in city center Nairobi shops. She converted one of the lodgings—Garissa Lodge—into a shopping mall that formed the blueprint for the Eastleigh malls that would follow: large buildings brimming with tiny shops from where the goods of low-end globalization can be sold. There are now around 50 such buildings, most of which follow this same blueprint. Somali women remain highly visible in all this economic activity too, many successful shops being owned by women, and even some of the malls themselves, including Garissa Lodge, although the strengthening of reformist forms of Islam in the estate has somewhat excluded women from some business networks (Carrier 2016: chap. 3; Ritchie 2019).

All this commercial growth has been built on mobility. Most obviously, the in-migration of refugees from Somalia is central to how the estate has developed demographically and economically, as is the increasing presence of Kenyan Somalis through rural-urban migration. For all these Somalis (especially those from well-represented clans), Eastleigh—despite its dangers that we will get to below—is somewhere they can feel at home through the presence of so many other Somalis. It is also a place where physical mobility can translate into social mobility, for those fortunate enough to become successful within its economy.

Eastleigh's growth is also a story of migration and mobility between the Global South and North. Many there hope that it will prove a springboard for onward migration to wealthy countries, though for most this remains a dream fed by *buufis*, the Somali term for a longing for resettlement elsewhere. For many Eastleigh can be a place of immobility. This is true for Ethiopian Oromo refugees in the estate too, and for those that cannot reach the desired lands of the West (or South Africa, the next stop for some after Eastleigh), years of frustration can pass by in Eastleigh (Carrier and Kochore 2019).<sup>1</sup> However, much money is sent as remittances for people in Eastleigh from relatives in places like London and Minneapolis (Lindley 2010), and much of this is used to help establish businesses. Bigger investments are also made, as opportunities to buy shares or shops in new mall developments are advertised on cable TV and other media across the Somali world. Diaspora investors often come in person too, establishing restaurants and other businesses somewhere that offer better returns than can be made in wealthy developed countries. Such investors have often worked hard in countries such as the UK and the US in jobs like taxi driving, saving diligently over the years. Eastleigh can offer such investors the chance to build businesses out of these savings, although some find navigating the less formalized business landscape of Nairobi difficult after life in Western cities.

While much business capital flows into Eastleigh from the Global North, the goods for which the estate is famous revolve around South-South mobility. Indeed, the development of Eastleigh is a story of ever-expanding trade networks that tap into the low-end global economy. There

are Kenyan-sourced commodities sold in the estate, but Eastleigh is most famous for clothes, jewelry, electronics, and other goods sourced through Somali-run networks that stretch from East Africa all the way to Asia. While original brands of clothing and electronics are available in the estate, there are many copied and knockoff goods too: one is more likely to find Hoog Boss there than Hugo Boss.

In the early 1990s, as Eastleigh's economy was growing, Dubai was the principal place from where its goods were sourced, a place that has long had a Somali population (Marchal 2001). Dubai remains important (and one of the earliest Eastleigh malls was named Dubai Mall in recognition of its importance to the estate), but Somali networks and their infrastructure of brokers, shipping and clearing agents, and money-transfer companies (*hawala*) have grown to incorporate many trade hubs, principally those in the Global South. Bangkok and Hong Kong were two places soon incorporated into Eastleigh's geography of trade, and also two places still recognized in the geography of Eastleigh itself: Bangkok Mall and Hong Kong Mall neighbor each other in Eastleigh. The opening up and development of key Chinese hubs for low-end goods such as Guangzhou in the late 1990s spurred Eastleigh's growth. Containers from China brimming with clothes and other goods constantly arrive. Somali networks are highly flexible, however, and more recently Istanbul has become a key source of goods sold, especially men's suits, seen as being a step up in quality from the goods of China. These goods are critical elements in the story of the estate, being the key reason why the estate is popularly visited by Kenyans, and people from even farther afield. They offer affordable clothes and electronics, allowing Kenyans to participate in global fashion trends, and also offer further livelihood opportunities to those who buy wholesale in Eastleigh to retail in other parts of the region.

This economy of "low-end" malls and goods—and informal business practices, much of the estate flowing on exchanges underpinned by social relations and "trust" (Carrier and Elliott 2018) rather than legal contracts—has offered opportunity to many, from refugees to Kenyan Somalis to Kenyans of other ethnicities whose livelihoods depend on the links of Eastleigh to other low-end global trade hubs. However, only a very few become rich in this economy, and many see dreams of entrepreneurial success come to naught: just as people hoping that Eastleigh can prove a stepping-stone to mobility toward more desired places in the Global North can find themselves immobile, so can many of those hoping Eastleigh's economy will allow them social mobility find themselves stuck.

The Kenyan state does well economically out of Eastleigh: although much trade has its informal side, and some evades the state altogether, revenue from rates, import duty, business permits, and the like mean that Eastleigh provides income to the Nairobi County government. Its role as a source of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities also enhances the argument that the estate is an economic boon to Kenya, an argument advocates among the Eastleigh business community are always keen to make. The reason they are so keen to do so is that this hub of mobile people and mobile goods is often felt to be under threat from wider Kenyan society.

In fact, how Eastleigh is perceived and treated by wider Kenyan society appears to oscillate between poles of suspicion as a place of illegal people and goods, and praise as a key business district linking Kenya to the world. The former pole often appears most dominant. Eastleigh has long been seen as different from the rest of Nairobi in terms of people and architecture. Its transformation into a Somali hub has further increased this sense of difference, as Somalis in Kenya have long been treated as suspect by the Kenyan state, ever since the 1960s and a war of secession in which many ethnic Somalis in Kenya fought for the northern region to secede to Somalia. Harsh security measures against Somalis (including atrocities such as the infamous Wagalla massacre) blighted the 1970s and 1980s, while the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees in the late 1980s led to regular screening exercises attempting to determine

whether Somalis were Kenyan or “illegal aliens.” All this has been heightened by the securitization of refugee policy in Kenya following the Kenyan military’s operations against Al Shabaab in Somalia, and reprisal attacks by Al Shabaab that have rendered Somalis further suspect. Such exercises have regularly targeted Eastleigh over the years, most recently in the heavy-handed security operation of 2014 when many were rounded up in Eastleigh and elsewhere and held in a sports stadium. At that time, many Somalis moved from Eastleigh to Uganda—which has long had a more welcoming policy to refugees—forming a new “Little Mogadishu” in Kampala (Iazzolino 2019), showing how responsive are dynamics of mobility to political shocks. This suspicion of Eastleigh as somewhere alien and dangerous—a place of otherness—even made it into international cinema. In the film *Eye in the Sky*, Eastleigh is portrayed as under the control of Al Shabaab militia driving around in “technicals,” pickup trucks with powerful machine guns. This portrayal is suggestive of how this part of Nairobi is perceived by some Kenyans as somewhere alien, as a dangerous part of Mogadishu dropped into the heart of Kenya.

On the other hand, Eastleigh has allies among Kenyan elites, and there have been attempts to incorporate Eastleigh more into the Kenyan mainstream. Eastleigh has been spoken of positively as a major business hub, one that should be included in Kenya’s development agenda, Vision 2030 (Carrier 2016: chap. 7). The current MP for Kamukunji—the constituency of which Eastleigh is a part—has also advocated for the estate, and is part of a broader group of Kenyan Somali politicians who have influence at the highest level. Somalis are no longer marginal in Kenya, politically and economically, and influential figures in Eastleigh are also active on social media and mainstream media to promote the estate and its business (Carrier 2019; Hassan 2019).

In many ways, Eastleigh does appear to be gaining a firmer foothold within Kenya, giving more security for its businesspeople and their trade. Indeed, Eastleigh business is even gentrifying in some ways, moving away from the “low-end” model, with new malls built with slicker designs and incorporating mainstream Kenyan chain stores and banks too: in some ways, the Eastleigh economy is formalizing. Somalis have also expanded well beyond Eastleigh within Nairobi, now owning many businesses in the central business district too, demonstrating their stronger footing (Hassan 2019). Yet Eastleigh and Somali business in general are still at risk of the fluctuating politics within Kenya. Somalis—Kenyan Somalis and Somali refugees—have proved useful scapegoats for the state on numerous occasions and might prove so again, even with more allies in the higher echelons of Kenyan society and politics.

Thus, Eastleigh and its residents and businesspeople are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of Kenyan politics. But, as a major conduit for goods popular in Kenya and beyond, and as a hub of mobility and social mobility through global connections, the estate also transcends its Kenyan location in various ways—it is many ways a “global city” (Sassen 1991) that gains power through its linkages to the global Somali diaspora, and to a constellation of other trade hubs. Understanding the estate and its power to attract in-migration is an exercise in scalar analysis, requiring both attention to its local and national context, and to its numerous links to elsewhere. One such crucial elsewhere is Guangzhou, to which we now turn.

## Xiaobei

Guangzhou, once known as Canton, has had a long history of foreign traders for two thousand years, but also a history of wanting to keep foreigners at bay, apart from the local population. After 1949 and the founding of the People’s Republic of China, foreigners largely vanished from Guangzhou, but began returning in the 1980s, and particularly in the 1990s and 2000s,



as Guangdong Province, of which Guangzhou is the capital, became the manufacturing powerhouse for the world. Unlike several other foreign neighborhoods in Guangzhou, the homes of affluent Europeans and Japanese, the foreigners in Xiaobei are predominantly African and Arab. There are no exact population figures for Xiaobei, because although the area is universally known as Xiaobei, it is not a district with formal boundaries, but rather is the name of a street and a subway station. There are only a few hundred Africans and Arabs resident in Xiaobei, due to Chinese residence restrictions, but there are typically thousands of Africans and Arabs in the area during afternoons and evenings (except during Chinese New Year, January through March, when Chinese businesses are closed)—it is the African and Arab heart of Guangzhou.

Guangzhou's Xiaobei is distinctly comparable to Nairobi's Eastleigh: many of the themes in the preceding section on Eastleigh ring true for Guangzhou. Both are neighborhoods where minority immigrants are found: in Eastleigh, Somalis in Kenyan Nairobi; in Xiaobei, sub-Saharan Africans and Arabs in Chinese Guangzhou. Local populations view both of these neighborhoods with trepidation as well as with a degree of attraction: just as Kenyans both fear Eastleigh and buy goods in Eastleigh, so too many Chinese in Guangzhou view Xiaobei with apprehension as a site of developing-world foreigners in China, while others delight in that foreignness: members of both camps of Chinese may say, "When I'm in Xiaobei, I don't feel like I'm in China anymore! I feel like I'm a foreigner here" (Mathews et al. 2017: 5). Just as Kenyan police closely watch the streets of Eastleigh looking for illegal Somali migrants, so too do Chinese police tightly monitor the streets of Xiaobei, seeking Africans and Arabs without proper visas, who, once found, are quickly taken off to jail. These neighborhoods are sites of feelings of home for Somalis in Kenya and Africans and Arabs in China—just as Eastleigh features its mosques but also its hamburger joints for Somali Americans, so too Xiaobei has its nearby mosque and prayer spaces, and underground Christian churches, forbidden by the Chinese government; and in the stalls of Baohan Street or Huanshi Middle Road or the upper floors of the Tianxiu Building, virtually every kind of African or Arab cuisine is available for patrons. Both neighborhoods embody dreams and rarely the reality of unimaginable wealth: in one of Eastleigh's clothing stalls, a clever merchant can make magnitudes more money than the per capita income of her home country, something all the truer in Guangzhou, where a clever and lucky trader may have an item manufactured by a Chinese company, ship it home by container, and potentially make tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars. By the same token the possibility of ruin is always apparent: contracts and courts may be of minimal use in both of these neighborhoods, and a cheating supplier, a customer's broken promise, a delayed container, or a confiscation of copied goods by authorities may mean ruin (see Lan 2017: 72–93; Mathews et al. 2017: 62–66).

Xiaobei differs from Eastleigh in many respects, not least in the effects of the colonial background on Eastleigh, as reflected in its very name; but two key contemporary differences concern the locus of trade in the two places, and the relation of local to nonlocal populations. While Eastleigh is a regional hub for Somalis obtaining goods from China and selling those goods to customers throughout East Africa, Xiaobei is a global hub, where African and Arab traders come to buy China-manufactured goods and send them to their home countries or regions to sell. Guangzhou, or its smaller rival in China, Yiwu, are the end points of a global circuit of low-end globalization that includes Hong Kong, Ho Chi Minh City, Bangkok, Istanbul, Dubai, and Nairobi, as well as Lagos and a number of other cities. This circuit is one that is personally followed by many traders we know: for example, Somali traders, as well as traders from a very wide range of other developing-world societies, come to Guangzhou to buy shoes or bags or clothing manufactured to specification in Guangdong Province, and perhaps go to Bangkok or Ho Chi Minh City as well to buy similar goods. One might query why merchants in Eastleigh and all the other developing-world locales from which entrepreneurs go to China to buy goods

cannot simply do this online. The answer is trust. If a merchant or her agents cannot personally inspect at critical points the goods manufactured by a Chinese factory or sold by a wholesaler, then the chances of being cheated or having goods stolen may be prohibitively high. The merchants or agents must be there to observe, in Eastleigh and in Xiaobei and, if possible, at points in between when, for example, containers are loaded.

Another difference between Eastleigh and Guangzhou concerns the different relations of the nonlocal to the local populations in the two places. While Eastleigh has many undocumented people among its residents, its population as a whole is clearly part of Kenya, exerting its own political power, with Kenyan Somali politicians having influence in Kenya. Xiaobei's African and Arab foreigners, on the other hand, are unambiguously foreign in the context of China, and although scholars have asked whether there might be an emergent new African Chinese ethnic group in the future (Bodomo 2010), or whether China might ever have its own Barack Obama (Mathews et al. 2017: 195–220), this seems highly unlikely for the foreseeable future, in a China that today seems to be doubling down on its Han Chineseness as against the foreign world. The foreigners in Xiaobei are seen as distinctly foreign and have no political power. Africans and Arabs—who practice low-end globalization in the same way in Xiaobei, although Arab traders on average have more capital—frequent different areas of Xiaobei, as separated by Huanshi Middle Road, and do not interact much socially. In private, African Christians sometimes deride Arabs as “terrorists,” while Arabs may deride Africans as “drug dealers” (Mathews et al. 2017: 12); but Muslim Africans often eat with Arabs in common halal restaurants, as well as praying together at the nearby mosque. Overt quarrels between members of the two groups rarely happen, largely because both are fully occupied in trying to get by in a Chinese environment they may find bewildering, and in which they may feel in continual danger of being cheated by their Chinese suppliers (Mathews et al. 2017: 62–66).

There is an array of different more or less outsider populations in Xiaobei and in Guangzhou as a whole. These include the millions of Chinese in Guangzhou, often migrants from the countryside, who lack Guangzhou residence permits (*hukou*). It is often women without *hukou* who became economically and sometimes romantically involved with African and Arab entrepreneurs, since they are at a disadvantage in the city, and can better their prospects through such relationships. There have also been Hui and Uyghur Muslim minority groups in Xiaobei, with the Hui acting as informal (and illegal) money changers, and Uyghurs selling a vast array of products, from bread to mutton to mobile phones to furs, in hawker stands in 2013–2014. Finally, and most outside among these groups, there are foreign traders from Africa and the Arab world. Xiaobei has become well-known in China and to some extent throughout the world, designated as “Chocolate City” by local Chinese (Pang et al. 2013). The ethnoscape of Xiaobei is even more diverse than that of Eastleigh, with one street full of Arab restaurants, several cafes the haunt of French-speaking Africans, and streets and malls full of “African grocery stores” as well as halal restaurants and shops selling virtually every imaginable good, retail or wholesale. There is a separate neighborhood, Sanyuanli, some three kilometers away, that has been the home primarily of Nigerian Igbo in their business—but even they come to Xiaobei by night, for it is where African traders stay up until the late hours, socializing and enjoying life.<sup>2</sup>

Xiaobei has only recently emerged as a home of developing-world foreigners, with African traders beginning to arrive only in the late 1990s. By 2007, the *Guangzhou Daily* claimed that there were 200,000 Africans in Guangzhou (Mathews et al. 2017: 56), but that number was wildly exaggerated, it seems; it is likely that there were no more than 30,000, and by the time Mathews and his students engaged in their research in 2013–2014, their estimate of the African population of Guangzhou was 10,000–20,000, many of whom frequented Xiaobei; the Arab population was considerably smaller. Xiaobei emerged as a settlement site for African and Arab

traders because it is near the main Guangzhou Railway Station and also Guangzhou's most prominent mosque, as well as being the site of a remaining "urban village" and thus of relatively low rents. Charlotte Ikels's (1996) ethnography of a Guangzhou neighborhood apparently quite close to Xiaobei (the neighborhood is disguised in her account) depicts no foreigners at all—in this regard, the emergence of a neighborhood of African and Arab traders in such a short time is quite extraordinary. Some 30 percent of the African traders in Xiaobei are female, but much more than male traders, their stays tend to be short-term; it is partly because men typically stay longer, whether legally or illegally, that romantic relations tend overwhelmingly to be between African and Arab men and Chinese women.

The European and American traders who came to Guangzhou in the 1700s and 1800s were kept in specifically designated foreigners' areas and were forbidden to learn Chinese (see Blussé 2008; Downs 2014). Their enforced isolation is not shared by today's African and Arab traders, but those traders still may feel distinctly isolated, with most of the African and Arab traders Mathews spoke with reporting that they had no Chinese friends—other than, perhaps, Chinese girlfriends. Official word on such a matter cannot be found, but it does seem that, following the opening of the Chinese economy in the 1980s and 1990s, the Chinese authorities were surprised by the coming of developing-world traders to Guangzhou and elsewhere in China. As one Chinese professor reported, when Guangzhou opened up in the 1990s, "we expected white people to come, not black people" (Mathews et al. 2017: 50). Chinese racism against Africans is well-documented (Cheng 2011; Sautman 1994), although how much it is due to skin color and how much to the perceived poverty of those of a given skin color remains an open question. On the internet racism is apparent, sometimes in terms of rants against Africans in Guangzhou (Lan 2017: 45–71); but in life on the ground in Xiaobei, there is a degree of equanimity, simply because money is to be made. Africans and Arabs sometimes complain about the racism of Chinese police in endlessly asking to see their IDs. Xiaobei has been very much "cleaned up" in recent years, with a much greater and more visible police presence. Jessica Wilczak (2018) has argued that this is due not so much to Chinese racism as to the desire of the authorities to create a metropolis that is globalized but also "clean, safe and orderly."

African and Arab traders who come to Guangzhou often arrive with little knowledge of the place, relying extensively on logistics agents of their own ethnicity who also serve as cultural brokers, and who may provide them with services ranging from meeting them at the airport to providing meals from their home country and a bed to sleep in. Most African and Arab traders come and go, within the limits of their limited-stay visas, but some remain, renewing their visas, obtaining business visas, or becoming overstayers. Some of these traders—particularly if they fall in love with Chinese and start families (see Mathews et al. 2017: 197–213)—stay and seek to make China home.

This becomes an extraordinary problem as far as China is concerned (although the situation is complicated: see Lan 2015). Frank Pieke (2012) has written of "immigrant China," reflecting on the fact that more and more foreigners have been coming to China; but as Robert Castillo has noted, "It is impossible to 'immigrate' to China" (2014: 242) in the way that immigration is thought of in Western countries, in that China lacks the legal framework to account for immigration; even those very rare foreigners who obtain "permanent residence" must register with authorities every year. As one Arab trader bitterly commented, "permanent residence in China isn't permanent" (see Mathews et al. 2017: 196). Underlying this is the sense that "China is for Chinese," not for foreigners, and particularly not for developing-world foreigners. This attitude is partly due to China's basis in ethnic more than civic identity—a foreigner cannot become Chinese in the same way that she could, for example, become Canadian (see Wu 1991)—and partly due to the fact that China is changing, becoming, in short, more "developed world," less a

part of the Global South and more a part of the Global North. Guangzhou was earlier so attractive for traders from the developing world because it offered electronic and other goods that were knockoffs of iPhones or Louis Vuitton bags that looked good and generally worked well, at least for a while, at 30 percent of the price of the original. As China becomes wealthier—and as Chinese factory workers' wages in Guangdong go up—this era may be ending (just as it ended many postwar decades ago in Japan, then in Korea, and then in Taiwan as centers for the making of copied and knockoff goods). Adding to this is the fact that to the middlemen go the profits: it clearly is to China's benefit to have its companies and factories in African and other developing-world countries rather than to have foreign traders come to China.

Indeed, Xiaobei has changed over the past several years, as earlier mentioned. When Mathews and his coauthors did research in Xiaobei in 2013–2014, it was a bustling site full of Uyghur merchants selling meat and bread and furs, Hui money changers changing money on the black market, and many thousands of African overstayers, whose visas to be in China had expired, but who were in the situation of feeling that they couldn't leave China yet because the goods they had ordered were still being manufactured and they couldn't surrender their dream of becoming rich. These overstayers, often Nigerian Igbo (see Haugen 2012) but of a range of different ethnicities and nationalities, were cracked down on by police beginning with a raid on Nigerian heroin dealers in August 2013 and continuing thereafter to target all those foreigners without proper visas. This has continued until today, when the remaining overstayers are hesitant to venture outside their apartments, so worried are they about being apprehended. Their heyday is largely over, and indeed Xiaobei itself appears to be diminishing. Many Africans and Arabs in Guangzhou are turning their sights to new places of business, such as Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City. Vietnam lacks China's restrictive visa regime and manufactures textiles rivaling Guangzhou's in quality and price, although not yet electronics (although that will come, African boosters of Ho Chi Minh City maintain). Low-end globalization is a world in constant flux, and as Guangzhou becomes wealthier, and Xiaobei in particular becomes more "clean, safe and orderly" (Wilczak 2018), these places may no longer be its destination and pinnacle.

And yet, a number of Africans and Arabs in Xiaobei maintain that they sought to stay for as long as they could in the neighborhood. Most particularly this was for some because they had Chinese lovers or spouses and sometimes children; in a more mercenary sense, this was because they felt that they could make a far better living in Guangzhou than they ever could back in their home countries, if not in some other Asian city. Some saw Xiaobei, and Guangzhou at large, as a better and more developed place than their home countries (which some characterized as being stifled by corruption). Africans and Arabs will continue to come to Guangzhou and to Xiaobei, and at least some will stay, as tiny parts of the convoluted path by which China will become a multiethnic and multicultural society. When and if this eventually happens, Xiaobei will deserve at least a small place within chronicles of Chinese history, as the first real foothold of the developing world in China, and perhaps a harbinger of China's eventual immigrant future.

## Discussion

Both of these case studies show how in considering migration and mobility within the Global South it is important to look at particular places (especially urban places) and their role in generating and reproducing patterns of movement. Of course, there are key differences. In Eastleigh, much of the movement we see can be classed as regional migration, although Somali

returnees from the diaspora in Western countries give the place a more global feel; in Xiaobei, we see migration principally of a more global scale, although its Uyghur and Hui and non-Guangzhou *hukou* populations demonstrate regional migration too. However, in both places migration and mobility is highly politicized: in Eastleigh, securitization in the wake of terrorist attacks, and age-old fear of Somalis in the country, has led to much hostility toward its Somali population; Xiaobei and its cosmopolitan population is not how China sees its ideal future relationship with Africa and elsewhere, the latter being much more a vision of Chinese in Africa, rather than Africans in China. Such places are built on migration and mobility, but states in the Global South are often every bit as intent on curbing this migration and mobility as those of the Global North.

Both places also speak of two key paths to migration that people in the global South travel along: those of asylum seeking or of low-end globalization—of obtaining political asylum as refugees, or of making money. For many of the Somalis in Eastleigh or Nigerians in Guangzhou, these paths are comparable strategies, with their comparative pluses and minuses. And these processes are bound to very distinct local places: Eastleigh, where Somalis recently fleeing Al Shabaab via the Dadaab refugee complex may rub shoulders with Somali Americans from Minnesota sent by their parents to Eastleigh to learn Islam for a summer; or Xiaobei, where middle-class Kenyans, Congolese, and Nigerians may discuss alternative strategies for making money in Guangzhou but eventually moving their families to a Western country—or, perhaps, returning to their home countries. The physical proximity of community in Eastleigh and Xiaobei is the major source for the imagination of possibilities in the world for those who live there. This is a major role of physical communities in a world of globalization.

Eastleigh and Xiaobei both offer hope of mobility—both in the form of literal movement to elsewhere, and of social mobility through economic success. They are seen as places where mobile dreams are capable of being grasped. Yet as we have also discussed, they can also be places of immobility, as people find what they hoped would be temporary stays en route to wealthier elsewhere and futures become protracted and even permanent. While the low-end form of globalization that has generated such commercial hubs of the Global South is far more accessible than that of high finance that weaves together London, New York, and Tokyo, it can also bring despair. Although nonhegemonic in various ways, the forms of capitalism that underpin these hubs can be as brutal as any other.

The future of such places and the people whose movements have formed them into commercial hubs is hardly secure, especially given the suspicion with which they are viewed. As we have seen, the trade networks of “low-end globalization” can also quickly shift as new opportunities arise elsewhere. Yet this shifting constellation of interconnected trade hubs in the Global South is likely to remain a major force in mediating the mobility and migration of many thousands. These trade hubs may seem humble compared with the likes of Tokyo, London, and New York, but are of profound significance for great numbers of people navigating globalization in the twenty-first century.

## ■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Neil Carrier and Gordon Mathews would like to thank the University of Bristol and Chinese University of Hong Kong Staff Exchange Programme for arranging the visit of Carrier to Hong Kong that led to this collaboration. They would also like to thank Mette Berg at *Migration and Society*, as well as the two anonymous reviewers.

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## ■ NOTES

1. Many Somalis and Oromo in the estate hope for resettlement in countries like the USA and UK, but such processes are protracted, and only a small proportion are able to move in this way.
2. African traders from different societies generally seem to get along in Xiaobei without overt conflict, but there is a degree of tension between Muslims and Christians, as well as between East Africans and West Africans. East African logistics agents say that they would be reluctant to accept an order from a West African (and particularly an Igbo) customer: "Why would such a person be coming here to do business?"

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